

Tourist Expectations: A Comparative Study between Non-Asian and Taiwan/Hong Kong Tourists in Kanazawa, Japan

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Tourist expectations of Japanese food in Kanazawa:

Comparative Studies between non-Asian with Taiwan and Hong Kong tourists

Abstract:

International tourists to Japan, or “inbound tourists,” have attracted considerable attention in the Japanese tourism sector. In particular, tourists from the Asian region, China in particular, are recognized increasingly as important target groups. To accommodate the demands of foreign tourists, the tourism industry must investigate the satisfaction and preferences of, as well as challenges encountered by both tourists and gastronomy sectors. By comparing the responses of tourists with those in the service sector, this study identified future tasks for inbound tourism. This study focused on tourists from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In a parallel questionnaire, employees of restaurants for international tourists in Kanazawa were interviewed. As second phase, results of the survey on tourists from Hong Kong and Taiwan were compared with results from other non-Asian tourists. A significant difference was observed for “communication between staff (language barrier)” among the two groups. In addition, “Wi-Fi Internet access” became clear that a degree of satisfaction is the lowest of all the survey items regardless of nationality.

Introduction

Significance of inbound tourism

Foods for international guests are relevant from the personal to the national strategic level in Japan. The trend of domestic travel by Japanese travelers is declining in the longer term because of population aging. As a result, the travel industry faces economic challenges. According to the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation (2009), the number of domestic travelers has greatly declined, causing 2 trillion yen in losses for the period of 1999–2009. Meanwhile, the decline of the labor force is expected to decrease national stay-over trips by 16.9%, or from 138,000,000 to 115,000,000, within the period of 2010–2030 (Development Bank of Japan, 2012).

Despite these trends, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicted the number of potential international travelers to increase 1.38 times within the next decade, and 1.9 times by 2030. Although the population in Japan and domestic travel needs may further decrease, the number of international tourists to Japan, or “inbound tourists,” is increasingly gaining salience. The increase from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan is given high attention as their volumes are large. Reflecting such strong interests, there are studies that analyze tourist behaviors of Chinese students in Japan (Shi, Nakatani, Sajiki, Sawauchi, & Yamamoto, 2010).

The Japanese government has recognized the need to promote inbound tourism, as seen in implemented policies, including the “Visit Japan Campaign” announced by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism in 2003. The campaign aims to raise awareness and appeal overseas, as well as produce or sell tourism-related products.

Trends in the number of visiting international tourists from 2000 to 2013 are shown in Figure 1. Despite the ups and downs, a general increase could be clearly seen in the number of international tourists since the early 2000. The government has played an active role in this increase through its tourism-oriented initiatives.

#Insert Figure 1 here#

Inbound tourism to Japan from Asia

Despite challenges, inbound tourism has potential in Japan, where a growing market is observed. The most important target group is Asian, given that Asians comprise 75% of foreign tourists visiting Japan (Carolus, 2009).

In the rank of profiles of international visitors to Japan, four of the top five nationalities visiting Japan are from Asia. For example, Japan received tourists from the following top five countries in 2012: Korea, Taiwan, China, the United States, and Hong Kong. As for the rate of increase in number of tourists from 2003 to 2012, data show that the number of tourists

from Korea increased by 40%, Taiwan by 87%, China by 218%, the United States by 9%, and Hong Kong by 85%. The highest increase is seen in tourists from China, followed by those from Taiwan and Hong Kong (Figure 2).

#Insert Figure 2 here#

Based on the above, the surge of tourists from China and Taiwan can be predicted to continue. In addition to the open gateway to Taiwan via Komatsu Airport in Ishikawa Prefecture and Toyama Airport in Toyama Prefecture, the Hokuriku region is expected to attract more Asian tourists as it becomes increasingly accessible. According to the number of foreign tourists to Ishikawa Prefecture, Taiwanese tourists account for the bulk of visitors compared with other nationalities (Figure 3). Hence, the importance of Asian tourists to Ishikawa Prefecture as well as the Hokuriku region is clear.

#Insert Figure 3 here#

Literature review

International guests and existing literature

Food is an intensively researched subject in the field of tourism. A growing and rich literature aims to capture the role of food and food service in tourism. Food ranks as the most important element for international tourists visiting Japan; tourists give it higher priority compared with nature-oriented trips or shopping (JNTO, 2011). Despite such critical importance in tourism, food “remains on the fringes of tourism research” (Everett & Aitchison, 2008, p. 151).

Two major perspectives exist on the subject of food and tourism, with an emphasis on host–guest interactions: one is from the social sciences, in which views tend to be personal, and the other is from marketing or management studies (Quan & Wang, 2004). The focus of the first is on individuals. In other words, works in this realm examine the meaning for or experience (or “peak experience” for some studies) of the tourists, whereas those in the latter focus more on the consumer aspect, such as analyses of hospitality accommodations and transportations. There are studies in this group that examine the motivations for the “cruise vacation” specific for Taiwanese tourists in northern America (Josiam, Huang, Spears, Kennon, & Bahulkar, 2009).

As for studies from the second group, “international cuisine” has been examined in different contexts. Most of the studies examine the concept of acceptance of ethnic cuisine. Studies on acceptance analyzed Europeans as tourists or residents or examined the acceptance of European cuisine. Meanwhile, other works have focused on the acceptance of ethnic cuisines among international students who are tentatively in the country of investigation (Brown, Edwards, & Hartwell, 2010), residents with different ethnic backgrounds (Verberke & Lopez, 2005), or among tourists (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). As such, the body of studies on the issues of inbound tourism is extensive. The current study primarily focuses on language barrier in the food industry.

Language barrier is a significant challenge in international tourism. This challenge is not limited to Japan. In other countries, language barrier is a subject of quantitative research as well. This barrier is examined not only for tourists but also for employees with international backgrounds (Madera, Dawson, Neal, & Busch, 2012). Further, language is regarded as a key element in promoting sustainability in the tourism industry (Gallato, Gallato-Reamillo, Valdez, Warokka, & Hilman, 2012).

As for the Japanese context, where a larger market is foreseen for inbound tourists, several challenges must be addressed. Indeed, new system, including training, services, and information dissemination, must be developed in different languages. This requirement places

a heavy burden especially for employees in the tourism sector.

Language barrier is a crucial challenge for visitors to Japan. In comparing the negative perceptions of tourists before and after traveling to Japan, the Japan National Tourism Organization (2008) described the “high living cost” as the most negative image of Japan, scoring the highest percentage of 15.0%. However, this value improved to 11.1% after visitation. In other words, this issue remains a challenge but empirically shows improvements after foreign guests visit Japan. The language barrier element, meanwhile, worsened from 3.0% to 4.5% after tourists’ visit (Table 1). Language and traffic worsen the perception of visitors upon their visit to Japan.

#Insert Table 1 here#

The International Hospitality and Conference Service Association (2010) surveyed accommodation facilities, such as Japanese- and Western-style hotels, and national tourism/hotel/other related associations on their reception system for foreign tourists. The survey asked regarding “worries in receiving foreign tourists,” and 73.4% of respondents indicated not receiving foreign tourists because of the “issue of language.” Hence, if language barrier is overcome, reception may be greatly improved.

In Kim’s (2011) survey, 45 Japanese working in tourism associations or related jobs and

100 foreigners, including Chinese and Korean respondents, were asked to state their perception as regards the weakness of Japan as a travel destination. The Japanese respondents ranked “language barrier” as the top weakness, whereas this item was the third choice among international guests. Hence, the Japanese seem more anxious of foreign language communication than necessary. Akiyama and Shiotani (2005) also reported that international tourists visiting Japan for the first time tend to select spots based on whether or not they could communicate smoothly with locals.

Thus, language barrier as an issue in inbound tourism varies in ranking among studies. Nonetheless, it is not the only issue. To ensure that the tourist reception system is fully prepared for foreigners, its status and challenges must be better understood.

For example, another emerging challenge is Wi-Fi Internet access readiness. The Japan Tourism Agency (2011) reported that among “the most troublesome issues during travel in Japan,” “free public LAN connections (23.9%)” and “language barrier (17.5%)” are ranked first and second, respectively, by foreign tourists. Measures are being taken by the central and local governments. For example, free Wi-Fi (wireless LAN) area services were extended for international tourists from parts of Sendai to all over the northeast area in the Tohoku region (Nikkei Inc., 2013). However, free Wi-Fi remains a challenge even in the case where it is technically available because of the complicated registration process. In the current study, the issues of both language barrier and Wi-Fi connection will be analyzed.

Status and issues of inbound tourism in the Hokuriku region

In tourism in the Hokuriku region, the inbound market is expanding. Further, as the area is home to abundant tourism resources, it has a huge potential in attracting tourists from Asia. An increase in domestic and inbound tourists is expected with major changes in the traffic system, particularly with the improvement of the Hokuriku Shinkansen (bullet train), which will be extended from Tokyo to Kanazawa in 2015 (Development Bank of Japan, 2013).

Based on experiences from other regions with bullet trains, the Hokuriku region will doubtless receive a larger number of tourists. Thus, the ways through which it will accommodate the upsurge in inbound tourism, which will continue for at least a few years, merit consideration. Given the above context, a critical measure is to analyze the needs of tourists and compare them with the services offered by reception systems at restaurants and hotels. In addition, segments of data are best studied by clusters of cultural backgrounds, such as Chinese, Western, or other ethnic/cultural backgrounds. If the reception system is flawed, tourist satisfaction would be low, and consequently, obtaining returning visitors would be difficult.

In a similar vein, Nomura (2002) identified actions to take to attract foreign tourists to the Hokuriku region, including various advertising activities corresponding to various

countries and adding diverse foreign cuisine into restaurant menus. According to Nomura (2002), the industry must respond to diversity among international tourists; practices or offerings should depend on the tourists' countries of origin.

In a previous study, the concept of food and services was surveyed for international tourists in Kanazawa (Development Bank of Japan & Kohsaka, 2013). The survey targeted tourists traveling individually or with family, mainly from European nations, the USA and other developed countries.

As for the restaurants, 33 restaurants in Kanazawa City and 192 international tourists were surveyed. The results indicated that 84.8% of restaurants are either passive toward international tourists or do not intend to attract them. The major reason selected by 57.6% of restaurateurs was "the concern for language barrier." In this aspect, the staff and foreign tourists have a gap in concerns, as the latter are not as troubled in whether or not they could understand the restaurant staff. However, given its target group, this previous study excluded tourists from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

The results of DBJ and Kohsaka (2013) inspired the questionnaire used in the current study, modified only to apply to Taiwan and Hong Kong tourists, including those in group package tours. This study further adjusted the target population, method, and survey questions with additional questions on Chinese customs to determine the satisfaction of tourists from Hong Kong (China) and Taiwan toward restaurants. These target groups were chosen as they

contribute to the greatest and highly increasing number of foreign visitors. Further, the current study aimed to identify the diversity in the needs and satisfactions of tourists and thereby address the research needs identified by Nomura (2002).

To ascertain if regional differences exist, the outcomes of the above were compared with those for Western tourists using data from DBJ and Kohsaka (2013). Based on the results for willingness and needs expressed by the restaurants receiving international tourists as well as the wants and preferences identified by the tourists, the current study could identify gaps or room for improvements.

Methodology and Study Location

Location and population

The research locations were selected based on informed expectations of areas that would have the most number of foreign tourists in Kanazawa City. To be specific, target locations were areas around the Kenrokuen Garden, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, and Higashi Chaya District.

The target population included 70 foreign tourists visiting Kanazawa City and 4 restaurants within the city. Among the foreign tourists, 8 were individual tourists from Hong Kong, 16 group tourists from Hong Kong, 8 individual tourists from Taiwan, and 38 group

tourists from Taiwan. A group tour is defined as “consisting of a large number of tourists and arranged by a travel agency.”

As for the target restaurants, the study chose those that actively receive foreign tourists, especially group tourists, given that Chinese tourists are more likely to visit areas in groups. Another reason for choosing the more active restaurants is that, as they have more experiences in attending to foreign tourists, their reception system may be more considerate compared with that of other restaurants. Such a study of model cases may provide examples for other restaurants to improve their reception system.

As described earlier, datasets for Western tourists were taken from DBJ and Kohsaka (2013) for the comparative analysis. The comparative data comprise information on Western tourists: 36 Australians, 26 Americans, 26 British, 24 French, 15 Spanish, 11 German, 10 Canadians, 9 Italians, 6 Dutch, 5 Russians, 3 New Zealanders, 3 Swiss, and 18 from other countries.

The survey period of foreign tourists lasted eight days: four days from October 24 to 27, 2013, and four days from October 31 to November 3, 2013. Restaurants were surveyed from November 5 to 8, 2013, during weekday afternoons between 14:00 to 16:00 to coincide with the off-peak period for the staff.

Face-to-face questionnaire interviews were conducted for both foreign tourists and

restaurant staff. Foreigners were sought around the Kenrokuen Garden and 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art. Chinese tourists were invited to complete a survey while they were walking or resting.

Meanwhile, the selected restaurants were individually visited, with the person in charge asked for permission. The restaurants in this study are located around the Kenrokuen Garden and Higashi Chaya District.

Limitation

The current research method has two major limitations, both of which are related to the profile of the interviewees. First, the data on foreign tourists from mainland China were insufficient. Hence, tourists from mainland China were excluded from the research. This situation may be attributed to the impact of tense international relations between the two countries due to the territorial dispute.¹⁾ Further, individual tourists were significantly fewer than group tourists. Another reason was the difficulty in identifying individual Chinese tourists from Japanese locals.

Second, the participating restaurants were few in number, which could primarily be because of the small number of restaurants actively accepting international group tourists in Kanazawa City. These issues were the two sources of limitation, and possibly bias, of the current study in terms of sampling. Nonetheless, the results of this study could be compared

with larger samples of restaurants and results from mainland China in future research.

Results

Comparison of Chinese tourists and Western tourists

Satisfaction over restaurants

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with Taiwan and Hong Kong tourists to determine their satisfying experiences from and preferences in visiting restaurants in Kanazawa City. The questionnaire contained three categories of “menu,” “service,” and “cuisine,” each of which covered 12 detailed items. For each question, respondents chose from a Likert-type scale of responses marked 1 to 5.

Figure 4 presents the comparison of the satisfaction of Taiwan and Hong Kong tourists toward restaurants and that of Western tourists in DBJ and Kohsaka (2013). The mean is also shown in the figure. Based on the results, tourists from both groups were clearly satisfied with the “hospitality of the staff,” “atmosphere,” “taste,” and “inclusion of images or pictures on the menu.” However, both groups of tourists indicated the least satisfaction for “Wi-Fi Internet access.”

#Insert Figure 4 here#

Application of t-test for satisfaction scoring

To verify whether Chinese and Western tourists differed in satisfaction levels for restaurants, the Welch's t-testⁱⁱⁱ (two-tailed, $p < 0.1$) was applied. The p -value here are defined as the level of marginal significance within a statistical hypothesis test, representing the probability of the occurrence of a given event, in this case responses and their differences to the questionnaire. The smaller the p -value, the more strongly the test rejects the null hypothesis.

“Language barrier” (communication between tourists and staff) was tested first. To determine whether Taiwan/Hong Kong and Western tourists showed a significant difference in this aspect, the null hypothesis was “there is no difference.” The result showed that “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier)” received a p value of 0.07704, with 10% as the significance level; thus, the null hypothesis was invalid, and a significant difference was found (Table 2). The difference is largely explained by the fact that Japanese staffs are more used to communicate with Western than Chinese backgrounds. This is largely attributed to the language ability of the Japanese staffs, as English is compulsory in the early education system while Chinese language is optional, mostly at the university level. The other element is partially due to the lack of training in cross-cultural communication, including non-verbal communication of body languages, with guests from Chinese backgrounds.

#Insert Table 2 here#

The *t*-tests further proved significant differences in the following: “inclusion of images or pictures on the menu,” “hospitality of the staff,” “atmosphere,” “taste,” and “price.” Although “hospitality of the staff,” “taste,” and “price” were at 1% significance level and null hypotheses were rejected, the significant differences in these items were pronounced. Meanwhile, other items at <10% significance level did not show significant differences.

Table 3 lists the above *t*-test results, except for those on “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier).” Each value in Table 3 is shown with its corresponding *p* value. Items marked with “*” refer to those with $p < 0.1$, whereas “**” marks items with $p < 0.01$. Both symbols indicate significant differences, with the latter with “**”—indicating stronger significance in hospitality of the staff, price and the taste.

#Insert Table 3 here#

Restaurants open to international guests

Developing systems

Concerning the menu and facilities, this study inquired on the restaurants' practices. Based on the results, more than half of the restaurants indicated using or having the capability to adopt "menu in foreign languages," "menu including images or pictures," "various payment methods (e.g., credit card)." However, only one out of four restaurants was equipped with Wi-Fi Internet access (Figure 5).

#Insert Figure 5 here#

Service culture toward international tourists

As shown in Figure 6, most restaurants were concerned with "foreign languages." All restaurants shared the same issue at the beginning, and only one answered that they had overcome this challenge. Meanwhile, none of the restaurants identified "Internet access" as a challenge from the perspective of business operations and opportunity. .

#Insert Figure 6 here#

Staff language proficiency

Regarding the language proficiency of the restaurant staff, all answered “yes.” As for the languages spoken, again, all answered “English.” In addition, one restaurant had a multi-lingual staff member who could speak both English and Chinese.

Discussion

In this section, issues related to “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier)” from DBJ and Kohsaka (2013) and “Wi-Fi Internet access,” which was found to affect tourists’ satisfaction rating of restaurants, are discussed.

Language Barrier

According to the results above, a significant difference can be seen among tourist groups according to their view of “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier).” Particularly, groups from Western tourist groups generally report having higher satisfaction compared with Chinese tourists. A possible reason may be that more restaurants have staff who could speak English but not Chinese. Indeed, the interview results to the restaurants in 4-2-3 revealed that whereas all restaurants reported having English-speaking staff, only one restaurant had Chinese-speaking staff, whereas all restaurants reported having

English-speaking staff. According to the mean satisfaction rate for “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier),” Chinese tourists scored 3.2 and Western tourists 3.5.

Hence, neither group is satisfied.

From the results for the restaurants, those that actively receive foreign group tourists still feel challenged by “reception in foreign languages.” Nevertheless, all restaurants in this study have hired at least one full- or part-time staff member who could speak foreign languages. Selected restaurants even provide language education or training. An issue is that staff members who could communicate in foreign languages might demonstrate the characteristicⁱⁱⁱ⁾ Japanese fear of making mistakes and thus still feel threatened by the issue of “reception in foreign languages.” If this case applies, restaurants should not feel overly worried as regards “reception in foreign languages” given that foreign tourists do not report an extremely low satisfaction in this regard.

Wi-Fi Internet access

Based on the results, both groups of Taiwan/Hong Kong and Western tourists are least satisfied with “Wi-Fi Internet access” among all 12 items as in Figure 4. ~~Such a result is reflected in 4-2-1~~ The results indicated that ~~where~~ none of the participating restaurants are reported to be ready for Wi-Fi Internet access. The ~~issue underpinning challenge is not technical but rather, however, these lack of awareness by restaurant owners as shown in~~

~~4-2-2, since restaurants began receiving foreign group tourists, because~~ Internet access had never been considered ~~an~~ real issue. Therefore, the importance of “Wi-Fi Internet access” and related facilities needs to be acknowledged first. In addition, a crucial move is to identify how facility readiness appeals to foreign tourists and brings profits to restaurants.

Conclusion

This study investigated the satisfaction of Taiwan and Hong Kong tourists toward restaurants, the outcome of which was then compared with that for Western tourists. Meanwhile, restaurants actively receiving foreign group tourists were surveyed to determine aspects of their reception system. The results indicated differences between Chinese and Western tourists. To elucidate such a phenomenon, the awareness and reception system readiness of restaurants were further examined. As such, for the Hokuriku region, the different levels of correspondence between reception for foreign tourists and their respective country of origin, which was not clarified in the pilot study, is now partly understood.

However, this study is limited by the insufficiency of data, especially on tourists from mainland China and restaurants actively receiving foreign tourists. Consequently, the reliability of the current work might be negatively affected. Future related studies should gather more data to increase the accuracy of analyses.

In conclusion, this study found that, although restaurants consider “reception in foreign

languages” as an issue, foreign tourists, regardless of nationality, are satisfied with the “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier)” to an extent. Another observation is that “Wi-Fi Internet access” and “websites in foreign languages,” which most local restaurants have ignored, are major areas for dissatisfaction of foreign tourists. In identifying such gaps, this study aims to help restaurants address their fears by acknowledging them. As the issues are clearly indicated, the findings may support restaurants in providing appropriate and responsive reception for foreign tourists.

i) Foreign tourists visiting the Kenrokuen Garden in January–July 2013 increased by 70% (120,489 people) compared with the same period in the previous year. However, the number of Chinese tourists decreased by 10% (2,432 people) due to the impact of the territorial island dispute. The number of foreign tourists visiting the Kenrokuen Garden is proportional to the number of foreign travelers in Ishikawa Prefecture, which serves as an indicator of the trend of foreign tourists (The Hokoku Shimbun, August 7, 2013).

ii) Descriptive points related to the *t*-test (Ueda, 2009).

iii) According to Cho, B. & Cho, K. (2011), “Japanese learners are generally hard on themselves and seek perfection. They unconsciously discipline themselves to be like native speakers in grammar or language structures. They feel worried if they cannot speak perfectly, and thus falsely take being speechless as being wise (p. 64).”

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Figures with captions

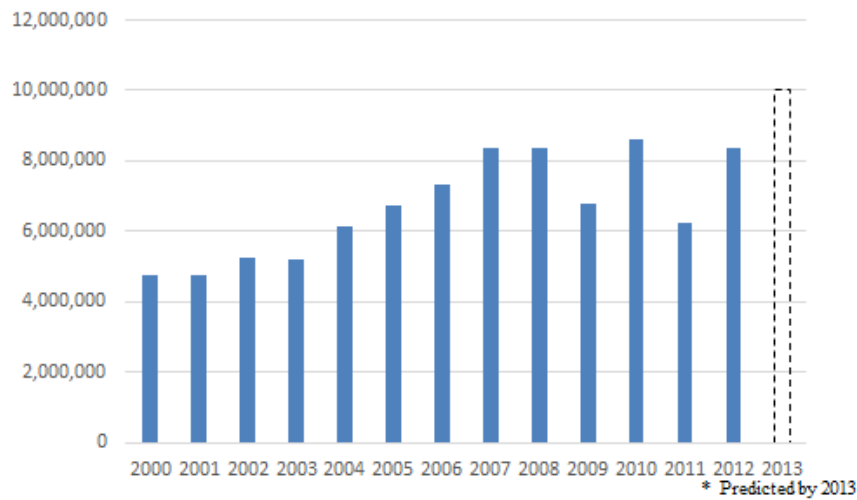


Figure 1 Trends in inbound tourism in Japan

Change in number of foreign tourists to Japan, drawn by the author.

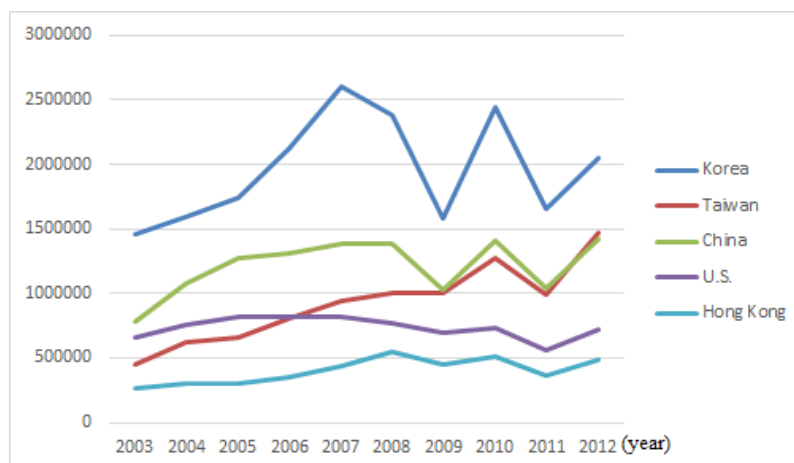


Figure 2 Changes in the number of foreign tourists by origin country/region (top 5).

Referenced from “Numbers of visitors, based on nationalities/month (2003–2013),” a report by the Japan National Tourism Organization.

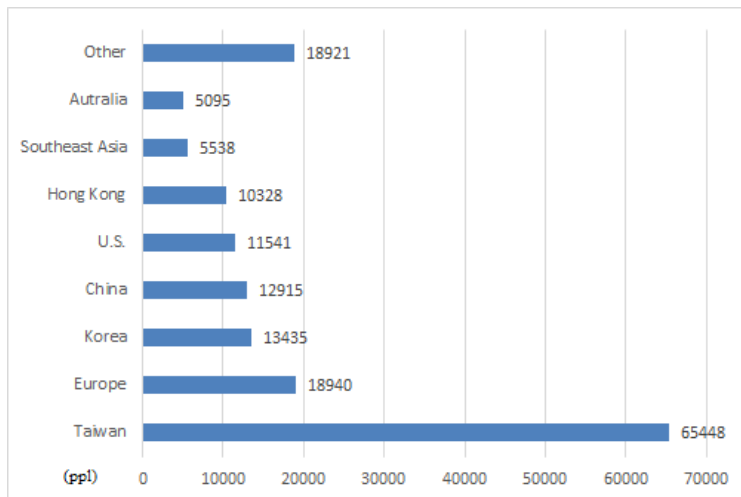


Figure 3 Foreign tourists in Ishikawa Prefecture in 2012 by country/region.

Taken from “Sightseeing of Ishikawa Prefecture seen from statistics in 2012 (2013),” provided by the Ishikawa Sightseeing Strategy Promotion Department, Ishikawa Prefecture.

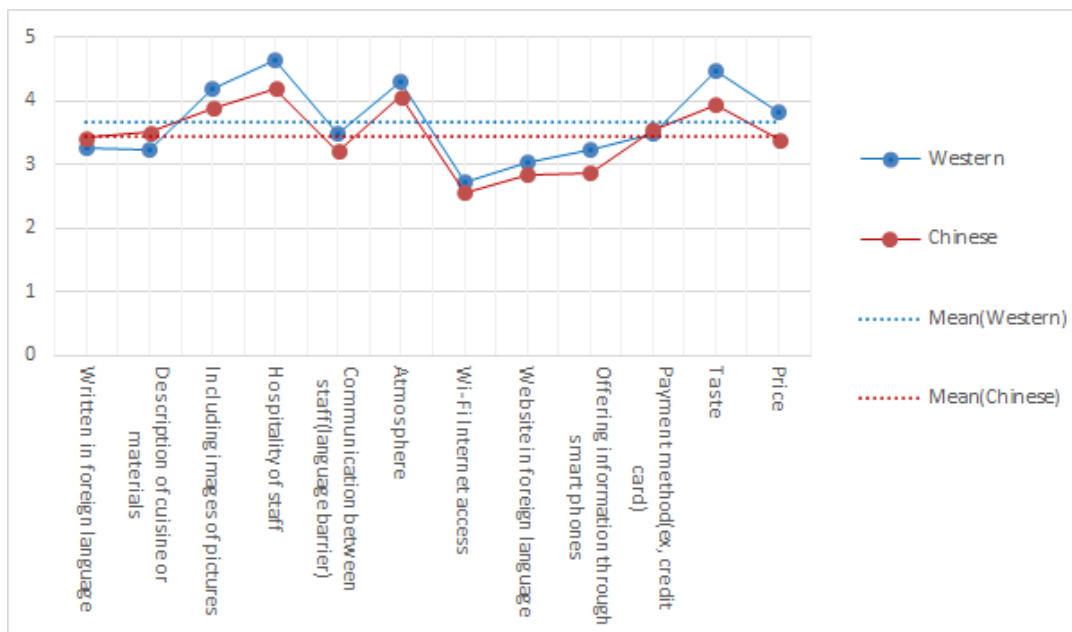


Figure 4 Means of all items on satisfaction for restaurants (comparison).

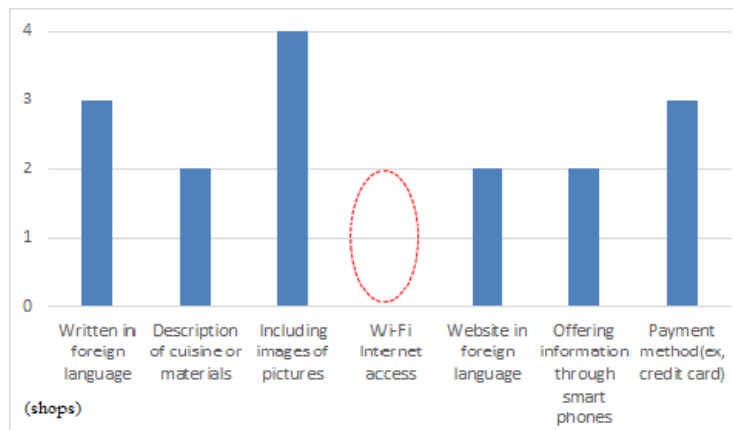


Figure 5 Reception system for foreign tourists (total of four restaurants).

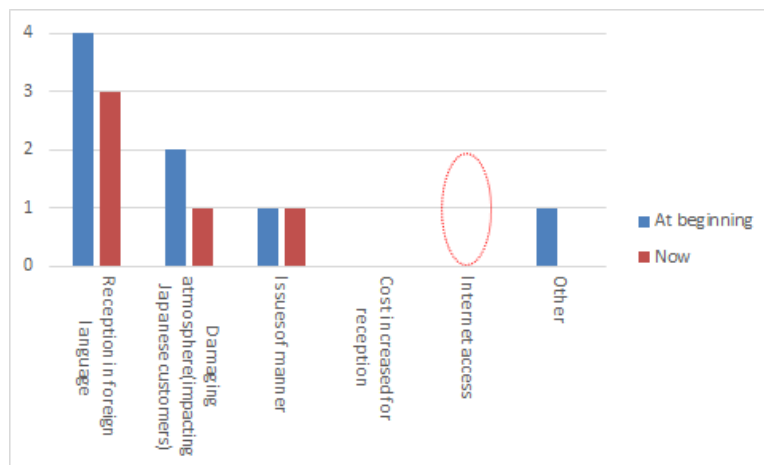


Figure 6 Issues in receiving foreign group tourists (multiple answers).

Tables with captions

Table 1. Comparison of tourists' negative perceptions of Japan before and after traveling to Japan (top 5).

Partly referenced from the Japan National Tourism Organization report: “JNTO investigation of actual condition of foreign travelers visiting Japan in 2006–2007: Satisfaction survey (2008).”








		Before visit		After visit	
1st	High living cost	15.0%		High living cost	11.10% 1st
2nd	Language barrier	3.0%		Language barrier	4.5% 2nd
3rd	Not used to/like the food	1.6%		Not used to/like the food	1.7% 3rd
4th	Japanese are unwelcoming	1.5%		Traffic being inconvenient	1.7% 4th
5th	Traffic being inconvenient	1.0%		Japanese are unwelcoming	1.0% 5th
		※  Rates unchanged or increased			
		 Rates decreased			

Table 2 *T*-test outcome of “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier).”

	Chinese	Western
Mean	3.2	3.5
Variance	1.2	1.1
Observations	66	145
Hypothesized Mean Diff	0	
df	121	
t	-1.8	
<i>p</i> -value	0.077	

Table 3 Results of all *t*-test runs excluding that for “communication between tourists and staff (language barrier).

Menu in foreign languages	Including images or pictures
0.342	0.069 [*]
Atmosphere	Hospitality of staff
0.062 [*]	0.002 ^{**}
Communication(language barrier)	Wi-Fi Internet access
0.453	0.500
Payment method(ex. Credit card)	Offering info thru smart phones
0.658	0.140
Price	Taste
0.006 ^{**}	0.000 ^{**}

The asterisks *, **indicate that the coefficients are statistically different from zero at the 10, and 1 percent level